

Thurston Parish Council



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Revised **June** 2022

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1. INTRODUCTION

Thurston Parish Council has developed a community engagement strategy with the aim of constructing a standard for engagement with its residents and partners. It recognises that the services it provides must reflect the needs of its parishioners and the locality. Thurston Parish Council strongly believes that its residents should be involved in decisions affecting them and their neighbourhood and in shaping the future of their parish.

2. AIMS

The aim of the strategy is to improve the way in which the Council engages and consults its residents and partners on important issues by informing, consulting and involving, being inclusive and engaging with all of its residents and partners, ensuring views are listened to and used to develop, enhance and improve services, the environment and the quality of life for residents.

3. OBJECTIVES

- To improve, plan and shape the future of the parish according to local needs and priorities.
- To improve the quality and delivery of services.
- To use engagement to inform decision making, ensuring decisions are fit for purpose and meet the needs of the parish.
- To enhance the well-being of the parish.
- To be a stronger, more active and cohesive parish.
- To provide a user-friendly website to drive interaction with residents and stakeholders.
- To utilise all forms of communication to ensure that the parish council is able to communicate with its residents on a variety of platforms.

4. HOW THIS WILL BE ACHIEVED

Community engagement will be achieved by Thurston Parish Council by communicating, consulting, supporting and working together with its residents.

• Communication Channels

Communicating with members of the parish will be achieved in many ways to ensure all sections of the community are reached.

The Thurston Newsletter and, where necessary, leaflets and/or postcards delivered to all dwellings, will inform residents on important issues and will be developed as a medium for consultation with members of the parish on topical issues.

The Parish website has a wealth of local information and is updated on a monthly basis. Special events and important notices will continue to be added regularly. All agendas are advertised as required under the Local Government Act 1972 & Transparency Regulations including on the website and on the **four** parish noticeboards. Minutes of meetings are included on the website within a calendar month of the

meeting. **Hard copies are available to view in the parish council office.**

Links to other websites connected with the Parish of Thurston links will be formed with webpages connected to the parish for Thurston to ensure a two-way communication link and to provide residents and those working within or close to the Thurston area with a link from the village site to theirs.

Meetings of the Council and its Committees are open to the public and include an opportunity for members of the parish to engage with councillors. All meetings include a time for public participation and commencement times will be advertised on the agendas.

Annual Meeting of the Parish will take place in conformity with current legislation and take place between 1 March and the 1 June (inclusive). Meetings should not commence before 6pm. The purpose of the meeting is to give the Parish Council, and other local organisations an opportunity to let local residents know what they have been doing over the past year. The meeting is also an opportunity for electors to have a say on anything they consider valuable to the people of the Parish.

Social Media: utilising the Facebook platform, the Parish Council are able to post public notices and information in a timely manner. It also provides direct links to the parish website to ensure users are able to access the relevant information without the need to search. *It should be noted that this platform is used to provide important information only and not intended as a form of unsolicited engagement.*

Direct Responses: email, phone, in person representations. The Parish Council is open to the public 2 days of the week: Wednesday and Friday between 9.30am and 3.30pm. Outside of these hours, the Office mobile is monitored to ensure that a response is provided where necessary. All telephone numbers and email addresses for Council's staff are widely circulated and details are maintained on the **Suffolk-link**.

Councillor Surgeries: provide an opportunity for the community to informally engage with the Parish Council on any matters relating to Thurston. They allow individuals who are not digitally minded or lack the confidence to speak at meetings to put forward their comments for consideration by the council.

- **Consultation**

Consulting all parishioners on important issues will be key to the strategy. It will ensure those most affected are able to put forward an opinion and given an opportunity to make a difference.

Ensuring consultations include all members of the parish by identifying the hard-to-reach groups such as youths, the elderly, the housebound, the disabled, ethnic minorities etc. may require establishing different engagement channels for them.

- **Support**

Supporting local organisations and engaging with them will assist them in meeting their own aims and objectives.

Supporting local projects and participating in local events will raise the awareness of the Council and its aims and objectives.

Supporting members of the parish in shaping the future of their parish will bring about a more cohesive community.

- **Acting Together**

Acting together with residents and partners in finding solutions to local problems will ensure they will be accepted and fit for purpose.

Acting together to carry out agreed action plans will engage the community in working with the Council to enhance the environments and the quality of their lives.

Acting together in decision making and policy drafting will ensure they have a voice and can make a difference.

5. **MEASURING SUCCESS**

Success will be measured by predefined targets, including annual reviews of consultation outcomes, monitoring residents' participation in consultation processes and increases in their involvement in local projects and events.

6. **STRATEGY REVIEWS**

Annual reviews of the consultation processes and results will be used as a continual improvement process for changes or amendments to the strategy. The communications strategy will be supported by a Parish Council Action Plan which will evolve and will be resourced as communication needs dictate.

Both will be reviewed annually by Full Council and decisions for amendments taken at Full Council.

7. CONSULTATIVE PROCESS

Activity	Statement	Action	Partners
Raise awareness of consultation processes.	Promoting the strategy will be an ongoing priority.	Promote it through newsletters, leaflet drops, noticeboard and media sources.	Thurston Newsletter, Local Media, Thurston Library, Thurston Website, Social Media.
Identify minority/hard to reach groups.	These groups are often forgotten and by identifying them will ensure they are included in consultation processes.	Identify these groups and identify channels of contact and consultation.	Parish Council and Committees, Thurston Community College, Beyton 6 th Form College, Thurston Academy, Suffolk Family Carers, Social Media.
Identify consultation/focus groups.	This will enable smaller consultations to be initiated where specialist advice is required to inform decision making.	Identify members of the parish with specific skills who can be consulted on specialist subjects.	Thurston Parish Council, Local Organisations, Local Businesses, Stakeholders, MSDC, Suffolk County Council.
Identify consultation needs, priorities and importance	This will ensure there is no overkill, overlap or misuse of the consultation process.	Establish need, priorities and importance of consultation.	MSDC, Suffolk County Council, Community Action Suffolk.
Identify benefits of consultation	Consultations should be undertaken only if the outcome can be influential otherwise it may become meaningless and residents will become disinterested in the process.	Identify whether there is a real opportunity for people to influence decisions,	Existing groups within the village, Focus Groups. Social Media, MSDC, Suffolk County Council, Community Action Suffolk.
Feedback on consultations	This will keep all parties involved in the process and updated with the situation.	Agree methods of feedback to residents and partners and ensure this is adhered to and includes details of the use of information gained.	Thurston Website, Thurston Newsletter, Noticeboards, Social Media. If applicable: MSDC, Suffolk County Council, Community Action Suffolk.
Ensure outcomes of consultations are used to inform decisions and policies	All consultations will be undertaken to judge the best possible outcome for parishioners, locality and the environment.	Use the outcome of consultations to inform decision making and shape policies.	MSDC, Suffolk County Council, External stakeholders.

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